

**EDITORIAL**

# Stop the talk, save our forests now!

In the last two years, the country has lost two per cent of its remaining forest cover - dropping from 11 per cent to 9 per cent - according to a Joint Water and Environment Sector Review Report released this week in Kampala. This drop is rapid and consistent with trends over the last two or so decades.

In 1990, forest cover stood at 34 per cent of Uganda's total area but this had dropped to only 11 per cent in 2015, thus dropping to 9 per cent in 2017! If this trend continues, Uganda will likely have no forests to write about in the next 10 years! And with it will be gone a big chunk of our biodiversity and livelihood.

It is therefore extremely urgent that the government moves beyond talk and starts to do something more focused, more sustained, and more effective.

We must therefore focus on saving the remaining forest cover and restoring that which was lost.

**The issue:**

Vanishing forest cover

**Our view:**

What is therefore lacking is government initiatives and decisiveness. Taxes must be cut to zero and if need be the cost subsidized to enable all urban households, schools and hotels to move away from using charcoal to cook food.

The starting point is to find alternatives to materials that are primary drivers of deforestation - namely wood fuel/charcoal and construction/roofing.

Charcoal burning to feed the cooking needs of millions of Ugandans in the growing urban areas as well as supply on tons of logs to school kitchens and city saunas are perhaps responsible for half of all trees cut down in the country every day.

The other half is taken by the construction sector that uses wooden rafters and plain pieces for roofing and supporting concrete structures during the building.

Fortunately, we do not need to scratch our heads to find alternatives.

There is liquefied petroleum gas (cooking gas) that is a more efficient for cooking food, and there are steel/iron bars and plates that are good alternatives as rafters, and there are hard plastics to work as construction panels.

What is therefore lacking is government initiatives and decisiveness. Currently cooking gas and equipment in Uganda are quite expensive compared to all other countries in the region.

Taxes must be cut to zero and if need be the cost subsidized to enable all urban households, schools and hotels to move away from using charcoal to cook food.

Taxes on steel products should also be adjusted to a minimum to enable Ugandans use steel bars as rafters of choice when roofing their houses.

The government might be worried about losing some revenue from oil and steel companies but in the long run, a better environment will save money that would have been spent on medications, food relief, disaster management, etc that automatically follow environmental damage. Let us act now!

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